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A CALL TO BETTER MANAGE ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT ‘SUPERBUGS’

February 16, 2009, 4:30 P.M., Toronto – Superbugs or antibiotic-resistant organisms in Canadian health care settings and globally, are a significant public health threat and are on the rise as fewer anti-infective drugs are being developed, says Dr. Andrew Simor, lead author of a call-to-action paper, *Antimicrobial Resistance in Hospitals: How Concerned Should We Be?* published as part of a special series in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

Antibiotic-resistant organisms are pathogens such as bacteria or viruses which can cause serious, life-threatening infections in patients in health care settings who are often susceptible due to prior compromised immunity. These pathogens known as superbugs because they are resistant to anti-infective drugs, include methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus*, multidrug-resistant gram-negative bacilli such as *Acinetobacter baumannii*, and *Clostridium difficile*.

“Canada still has an opportunity unlike other countries, to act aggressively *now* to control rates of antibiotic-resistant organisms, to reduce rates in our health care facilities and in turn, to reduce the economic burden of antimicrobial resistance on our health care system,” says Dr. Simor, chief, department of Microbiology, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* invited Dr. Simor and Public Health Agency of Canada colleague, Dr. Michael Mulvey to co-author the paper.

The authors recommend:

- To establish a better-resourced National Surveillance System to monitor rates of antibiotic-resistant organisms in health care settings, to understand the impact of current guidelines and to more proactively improve control strategies.
- To increase attention to proper Hand Hygiene practice, and other Infection Prevention and Control measures which may include more rigorous screening and monitoring programs for current and newly admitted patients, ongoing investment in dedicated environmental cleaning, and closer collaboration with infection prevention and control in the design and construction of health care facilities.
- To formalize Antibiotic Stewardship Programs in hospitals to ensure the appropriate evidence-based use of antimicrobial agents and to audit and monitor for drug resistance.

Antibiotic-resistant organisms causing infection can be associated with adverse outcomes and prolonged hospital stays which put an enormous cost burden on health care systems.

In 2001, the mean attributable cost per patient with methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* was \$14,360, resulting in excess costs of at least a quarter billion dollars per year to the Canadian health care system for this one antibiotic-resistant organism alone.

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